DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 566 PS 016 866

AUTHOR Beeson, Betty Spillers; Williams, R. Ann
TITLE Sex Stereotyping of Young Children's Play in the Home.
PUB DATE [82]
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Family Environment; *Play; *Sex Differences; *Sex Stereotypes; Toys; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS Preference Patterns

ABSTRACT

Parents were asked to complete an information form when they registered their children in an early childhood education center. Answers to a question on the form concerning each child's favorite play activities at home were collected and examined in terms of sex differences. The parents in this study reported the same sex difference in children's play activities that have been observed in preschool settings. More boys than girls play with vehicles and blocks at home and in the preschool setting. More girls than boys are involved in art activities and dramatic play. The question might be: does the home play influence the preschool play or does the preschool play influence the home play or does the play of one setting reinforce and interact with the other. Certainly, the findings again illustrate the powerful influence of society's traditional attitudes toward sex roles. A 31-item bibliography concludes the document. (PCB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED287566

SEX STEREOTYPING OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S PLAY IN THE HOME

Dr. Betty Spillers Beeson and Dr. R. Ann Williams

Introduction

Since sex stereotyping limits and prevents both boys and girls from achieving their true potential, it becomes a crucial factor in the development of young children. A growing body of research indicates that play is also a key to children's learning and development. There is sex stereotyping of young children's play in the preschool setting. Is there sex stereotyping of play in the home?

In the past, it was a generally accepted fact that sex role differentiaton could be attributed to genetic and biological differences. Researchers continue to study and document this area, such as brain research indicating differences in brain functioning (Restak, 1979), and studies delving into sex differences in spatial perceptions (Eliot and Fralley, 1976). Today, the importance of cultural influences on the development of sex role differentiation is also widely recognized (Lewis, 1972; Birns, 1976; Zaichkowsky et al., 1982). Sex role stereotyping found in television programs, school curricula, and career opportunities is an example of often arbitrary cultural influences that shape sex roles in American society.

Historically, children's play has mirrored society's traditional attitudes toward sex roles. These traditional labelings of male and female play activities reflect the common beliefs society has held in regard to sex stereotyping. Boys are more active, noisier, and messier than girls. Girls are less active, quieter, and neater than boys. Boys excel in large muscle activities and girls in fine muscle activities. These are examples of how

PS 016866

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Betty Spillers Beeson
R. Ann Williams
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

sexism tends to limit the play opportunities of children.

Sex role stereotyping in play begins early and continues throughout childhood. Sex differences have been reported in the play activities of infants (Lewis, 1972), toddlers (Lowe, 1975; Fein, 1975 and Weinraub et al., 1984), preschoolers (see Table 1), school age children (Lever, 1976), and preadolescents (Erikson, 1951).

Some of the sex dfferences reported in the play activities of preschoolers in the last fifty years are given in Table 1. An examination

TABLE 1

PREVIOUS STUDIES REPORTING SEX DIFFERENCES IN PLAY ACTIVITIES OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Study	Sex	Findings
Williams & Beeson (1980)	Males	Blocks, wheeled vehicles water/sand
	Females	Art activities
Beeson & Williams (1979)	Males	Blocks, wheeled vehicles water/sand
	Females	Art Activities
Rubin (1977)	Males	Blocks, wheeled vehicles
	Females	Art activities
Tizard, Philps, & Plewis (1976)	Males	Tires, crates, wheeled vehicles
	Females	Climbing frame
Harper & Sanders (1975)	Males	Sand, tractor, climbing frane
	Females	Arts & crafts
Coates, Lord & Jakabovics (1975)	Males	Blocks
	Females	Dolls, formal games
Cramer & Hogan (1975)	Males	Blocks, vehicles
	Females	Dolls, furniture
Clark, Wyon Richards (1969)	Males	Blocks, wheeled vehicles
	Females	Dolls, art activities
Shure (1963)	Males	Blocks
	Females	Doll area, art
Vance & McCall (1934)	Males	Blocks
	Females	Housekeeping
Parten (1933)	Males	Blocks, trains, kiddie-kars
	Females	Art activities, houseplay

of these findings illustrates that boys participate in play activities that society considers masculine while girls participate in activities considered feminine.

Most available research on toy selection and toy preference has been conducted in an experimental or preschool setting. There is a dirth of research documenting the selection and preference of toys in the home. Two such studies report that sex stereotyping has been found in the use of toys in the home environment (Fagot, 1975; Giddings and Halverson, 1981). Boys played with blocks and manipulated objects such as transportation toys more than girls. The girls focused their time on dolls, dancing, and dress-up.

Rheingold and Cook (1975) surveyed the furnishings and toys found in the bedrooms of ninety-six children. The researchers assumed that differences would serve as an indicator of parental ideas about sex appropriateness of toys and room decor. The boys' rooms contained more vehicles, educational-art materials, sports equipment, machines, and military toys. Girls were provided dolls, dollhouses, and domestic toys. The girls' rooms were decorated with ruffles and floral motifs; those of boys, with animals.

In addition to the toys provided in the home, parents influence their children's play by encouraging sex appropriate play activities and discouraging cross-sexed toy play (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974; Langlois and Downs, 1980).

Parents influence their children's learning and development by the toys they buy for their children and the play that they encourage (Abubato, 1985).

Setting of the Study

An early childhood laboratory was the setting for this study. It is one of three early childhood education centers maintained by the department of elementary education at a midwestern university.

The primary goals of the Early Enrichment Laboratory, as described in its handbook, are to provide:

- a model early childhood program
- positive support and encouragement for parents as teachers
- a visitation site for child care workers
- a research facility for the study of young children
- observation, participation, and teaching experiences for undergraduate and graduate students.

To facilitate parent support and learning, an adult is required to remain with each child during each session. The laboratory is directed by a professor of Early Childhood Education and has two graduate students as teachers. The teachers changed each year of this study; however, the director remained constant.

The program meets twice a week for two hours each session. The morning session is for younger children, and the afternoon session is for older children.

Play is recognized as an important learning medium for young children. Opportunities are provided for a wide range of individual and small group activities including: blocks, water play, sand play, art activities, and dramatic play. Particular attention is given to language development. Fingerplays, songs, and discussions are all important aspects of the program.

The Subjects

The 329 children involved in the study were enrolled in the Early Enrichment Laboratory during a nine year period, beginning in September, 1977 and continuing through May, 1986. There were 169 males and 160 females, ranging in age from under two years old to over four years old as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
AGE AND SEX OF SUBJECTS

Sex of subjects	
Males	169
Females	160
Total	329
Age of subjects	
Under 2 years old	111
2 years old	96
3 years old	78
4 years old and over	44
Total	329

An effort was made to maintain a fairly even number of boys and girls. Table 3 indicates this was true throughout the nine years of the study with the exception of 1984 when there were nearly twice the number of boys as girls.

An analysis of the ages of the children attending each of the nine years is presented in Table 4. There was a gradual shift in age from older

TABLE 3
SEX OF SUBJECTS BY YEAR

Year	Males	Females	Total
1977	7	9	16
1978	9	6	15
1979	23	19	42
1980	29	21	50
1981	25	26	51
1982	13	19	32
1983	24	26	50
1984	22	14	36
1985	17	19	36
Total	169	160	329

to younger participants in the program. Overall, there was a lower number of four-year-olds and above.

TABLE 4
AGE OF SUBJECTS BY YEAR

Year	under 2 years	2 years	3 years	4 years and over
1977	0	0	8	9
1978	0	2	9	4
1979	13	15	11	3
1980	22	13	11	4
1981	19	16	10	6
1982	11	11	5	5
1983	20	13	14	3
1984	15	13	3	5
1985	11	13	7	5
Total	111	96	78	44

The children involved in this study represented a wide range of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Children of faculty, staff, university students, and the community-at-large were represented in fairly equal proportions. A small number of foreign-born children also attended the

program. Families in which both parents were employed outside the home, as well as single-parent families were represented.

Collection of Data

Parents of the children involved in the study were asked to complete an information form at the time of registration for the Early Enrichment Laboratory. The parents were asked to complete the response form as accurately as possible, since it would provide valuable information to help the teachers "better understand and work with your child." Parents were aware that the responses might be used for research purposes. The parents completed the form immediately at the time of distribution.

The information form was one and one-half pages long and contained general information pertaining to the child, as well as an activity preference question. The question was open-ended: "What are your child's favorite play activities?" The parent was instructed to indicate toy choices that their child preferred on a fairly consistent basis over a long period of time. The same registraton procedure and form was followed for nine consecutive years.

Based on Rubin's categories of play (1977), the following categories were included: vehicle play, art, table activities, dramatic play, guns, books, water play, outdoor play, and blocks. The responses on the information forms were then labeled according to category. For example, if a parent indicated that play with dolls was a favorite activity, it was coded as dramatic play. If a parent indicated that playing with puzzles was a favorite activity, it was coded as a table activity. Responses were recorded on the basis of year, sex, and age of the child.

Parents had the option of giving more than one response to the open-ended activity choice question. All responses were included in the study.

Analysis of Data

The data were initially analyzed to determine which play activities were reported by parents to be favorites among their children. Table 5 gives the proportion of children whose parents named that play activity as a favorite. Almost half of the parents reported that dramatic play was a favorite play activity of their children. Other popular activities were play with vehicles, books, and outdoor play. Play activities which were least popular, as reported by parents, included: guns, water play, and blocks.

TABLE 5
PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF
CHILD'S FAVORITE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Activity	Proportion
Vehicles	.482
Art	.220
Table Activities	.226
Dramatic Play	.665
Guns	.067
Books	.418
Water Play	.131
Outdoor Play	.323
Blocks	.140

The data were also analyzed in terms of favorite play activities for boys and for girls. As presented in Table 6, there were some differences in the proportion of males to females. Over two-thirds of the parents reported that their sons enjoyed playing with vehicles; only one-fourth of

the parents of girls reported vehicle play as a favorite among their daughters.

TABLE 6
PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF MALE'S AND
FEMALE'S PLAY ACTIVITIES

Activity	Males	Females
Vehicles	.696	.256
Art	.161	.281
Table Activities	.220	.231
Dramatic Play	.524	.813
Guns	.065	.000
Books	.429	.496
Water Play	.143	.119
Outdoor Play	.333	.313
Blocks	.190	.087

To test if these differences between the proportion of males and the proportion of females were significant, the data were analyzed using a t-test at a .05 level of significance. Table 7 indicates that there was a significant difference in the activity preferences of males versus females.

There was a statistically significant difference for wheeled vehicles ($p<.0001$). According to the parents, more males than females chose wheeled vehicles as a favorite play activity.

There was a statistically significant difference in play with blocks ($p<.01$). According to the parents, more males than females chose blocks as a favorite play activity.

There was also a statistically significant sex difference for art activities ($p<.01$). According to the parents, more females than males chose art as a favorite play activity.

Finally, there was a statistically significant sex difference for

dramatic play ($p<.001$). According to the parents, more females than males chose dramatic play as a favorite play activity.

TABLE 7
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR THE PLAY ACTIVITY PREFERENCES OF MALES AND FEMALES AS REPORTED BY PARENTS

Variable	Hypoth. SS	Hypoth. MS	t	Sign of t
Vehicles	15.879	15.879	8.855	.000 *
Art	.190	1.190	2.656	.008 *
Table Activities	.010	.010	6.237	.812
Dramatic Play	6.830	6.830	5.796	.000 *
Guns	.001	.001	.118	.906
Books	.041	.041	.408	.683
Water	.048	.048	.645	.519
Outdoor	.035	.035	.402	.688
Blocks	.869	.869	2.706	.007 *

Conclusions

The findings of sex stereotyping in the play of young children in this study are comparable to those reported in Table 1. The parents in this study reported the same sex difference in children's play activities that have been observed in the preschool settings. More boys than girls play with vehicles and blocks at home and in the preschool setting. More girls than boys are involved in art activities and dramatic play. The question might be: does the home play influence the preschool play or does the preschool play influence the home play or does the play of one setting reinforce and interact with the other. Certainly, the findings again illustrate the powerful influence of society's traditional attitudes toward sex roles.

Various intervention techniques have been used to modify sex stereotyping in group settings. Modeling of inappropriate sex typed play (Wolf, 1973, 1975, 1976) and rewarding cross-sex play (Servin, Tunick and Sternglanz, 1977) have produced mixed results. The results is this study may help to explain why attempts of various

programs to reduce sex stereotyping have not been extremely effective. One or two hours of intervention two or three times per week may not erase hours and days of sex stereotyped play that is allowed if not encouraged at home. Children can play with the toys that are available to them. They can not play with toys that they do not have. To bring about real change in the play activities of young children, parents will need to be made aware of how sex stereotyping limits children's play activities and may limit children from developing their full potential. Until sex stereotyped play at home is changed, little progress can be made in the preschool setting.

Bibliography

Beeson, Betty Spilliers and R. Ann Williams. "A Study of Sex Stereotyping in Child-Selected Play Activities in Preschool Children," ERIC ED 186 102 (November 1979):1-58.

Birns, Beverly. "The Emergence and Socialization of Sex Differences in the Earliest Years," Merrill-Palmer Quarterly 22 (1976): 229-254.

Clark, Anne H., Sally M. Wyon and M.P.M. Richards. "Free-Play in Nursery School Children," Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines 10 (1969): 205-216.

Coates, Susan, Mae Lord and Evelyn Jakabovics. "Field Dependence-Independence, Social-Non Social Play and Sex Differences in Preschool Children," Perceptual and Motor Skills 40 (1975): 185-202.

Cramer, Phebe and Katherine A. Hogan. "Sex Differences in Verbal and Fantasy Play," Developmental Psychology 11 (1975): 145-154.

Eliot, John and Jacqueline S. Fralley. "Sex Differences in Spatial Abilities," Young Children 31 (1976): 487-497.

Erikson, E. H. "Sex Differences in the Play Configurations of Preadolescents,"

American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 21 (1951): 667-692.

Fagot, B. I. "Sex Differences in Toddler's Behavior and Parental Reaction," Developmental Psychology 11 (1975): 830-836.

Fein, Greta et al. "Sex Stereotypes and Preferences in the Toy Choices of 20-Month-Old Boys and Girls," Developmental Psychology 11 (1975): 527-528.

Giddings, Martha and Charles F. Halverson. "Young Children's Use of Toys in Home Environments," Family Relations 30 (1981): 69-74.

Harper, Lawrence V. and Karen M. Sanders. "Preschool Children's Use of Space: Sex Differences in Outdoor Play," Developmental Psychology 11 (1975): 119.

Langlois, J. E. and A. C. Downs. "Mothers, Fathers, and Peers as Socialization Agents of Sex-Typed Play Behaviors in Young Children," Child Development 51 (1980): 1237-1247.

Lever, Janet. "Sex Differences in the Games Children Play," Social Problems 23 (1976): 478-487.

Lewis, Michael. "Sex Differences in Play Behaviors of the Very Young," Journal of Health, Physical Education and Recreation 43 (1972): 38-39.

Lowe, Marianne. "Trends in the Development of Representational Play in Infants from One to Three Years," Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines 16 (1975): 33-57.

Maccoby, E. and C. Jacklin. The Psychology of Sex Differences. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974.

Parten, Mildred B. "Social Play among Preschool Children," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 28 (1933): 136-147.

Restak, Richard M. "The Other Difference Between Boys and Girls," Young Children 34 (1979):11-14.

Rheingold, Harriet L. and Kaye V. Cook. "The Content's of Boys' and Girls' Rooms as an Index of Parents' Behavior," Child Development 46 (1975): 459-463.

Rubin, Kenneth H. "Play Behaviors of Young Children," Young Children 32 (1977): 16-24.

Servin, Lisa A., Illene J. Tonick and Sarah H. Sternglanz. "Shaping Cooperative Cross-Sex play," Child Development 48 (1977): 924-929.

Shure, Myrna Beth. "Psychological Ecology of a Nursery School," Child Development 34 (1963): 979-992.

Tizard, Barbara, Janet Philps and Ian Plewis. "Play in Pre-School Centres-I. Play Measures and Their Relation to Age, Sex, and I.Q.," Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines 17 (1976): 251-264.

Vance, Thomas F. and Louise T. McCall. "Children's Preferences among Play Materials as Determined by the Method of Paired Comparison of Pictures," Child Development 5 (1934): 267-277.

Weinraub, Marsha et al. "The Development of Sex Role Stereotypes in the Third Year: Relationships to Gender Labeling, Gender Identity, Sex-typed Toy Preference, and Family Characteristics," Child Development 55 (1984): 1493-1503.

Williams, R. Ann and Betty Spillers Beeson. "A Follow-up Study of Sex Stereotyping in Child-Selected Play Activities of Preschool Children," ERIC, ED 201 390 (September 1980): 1-51.

Wolf, Thomas M. "Effects of Live Modeled Sex-Inappropriate Play Behavior in a Naturalistic Setting," Developmental Psychology 9 (1973): 120-123.

Wolf, Thomas M. "Response Consequences to Televised Modeled Sex-Inappropriate Play Behavior," The Journal of Genetic Psychology 128 (1975): 35-44.

Wolf, Thomas M. "Effects of Live Adult Modeled Sex-Inappropriate Play Behavior in

a Naturalistic Setting," The Journal of Genetic Psychology 128 (1976): 27-32.

Wolf, Thomas M. "Influence of Age and Sex of Model on Sex-Inappropriate Play," Psychological Reports 36 (1975): 99-105.

Zaichkowsky, Leonard D., Linda B. Zaichkowsky and Thomas J. Martinet. Growth and Development: The Child and Physical Activity. St. Louis: C. V. Mosby, 1982.